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CIA 34 Sullivan, David
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SOVIET AEROSPACE ALMANAC

In the absence of an effective US response, the less-than-comprehensive terms of SALT I and of SALT II, as presently understood, will not prevent the USSR from legally attaining strategic superiority.

SALT and the Emerging Strategic Threat

BY PETER HUGHES

(EXCERPTS)

IN 1969, the United States entered the strategic arms limitation negotiating process (SALT I) with the Soviet Union. The purpose of these negotiations, according to then-President Nixon, would be to secure a "stable strategic relationship" with an "equitable limit on both offensive and defensive strategic forces." Specifically, the US wanted to contain the emerging Soviet threat against US ICBM forces, the vulnerability of which was and still is considered inimical to strategic stability—a central element of US deterrence policy. The Nixon Administration also was concerned about the "unchecked extension of [Soviet] defensive capabilities"—a reference to possible Soviet ABM deployment to protect its cities. As noted by Mr. Nixon, such a capability "might [lead the USSR to] believe that its defenses could clearly limit the damage [to its society] it might suffer from retaliation and therefore that it was in a position to strike first."

With the signing of SALT I in 1972, Nixon Administration officials argued that the agreement to limit offensive strategic weapons would check the rapid buildup of Soviet strategic forces and stop several Soviet programs from being developed and deployed. The second element of the SALT I agreement—the ABM treaty—was considered even more important than the limitations on offensive strategic forces. Ambassador Gerard Smith, then Director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, reflected this view when he said of the ABM treaty:

In effect [the treaty] says that neither nation is going to try to defend its nationwide territory. This is an admission of tremendous psychological . . . recognition that the deterrent forces of both sides are not going to be challenged. When you think of the concern that we have had for the last twenty-five years about first strike, and counterforce, it seems to me [that] a general recognition by both countries that they are not going to field a nationwide [ABM] system is of first importance, politically, psychologically, and militarily.

Subsequent to ratification of SALT I, US defense officials called Soviet strategic developments unprecedented, and beyond any reasonable requirements for purely deterrent or defense objectives. Indeed, illustrating the failure of SALT I to contain the momentum of Soviet strategic programs, US defense officials in the aftermath of SALT I testified before Congress that the issue was no longer "how to avoid initiatives that might continue or accelerate the arms competition [if it ever was]," but how to "interpret and respond to a wide range of potential Soviet initiatives."

Soviet Strategic Defenses

It is difficult to envision how SALT II will contain Soviet strategic developments. As with SALT I, US critics contend the SALT II agreement merely codifies planned Soviet strategic deployments—a view substantially bolstered by the CIA analysis done by former CIA employee Dave Sullivan. Sullivan's analysis, based on US intelligence information assessments of Soviet communications, reportedly illustrates quite clearly that the Soviet military has not allowed the SALT process to infringe on planned Soviet strategic forces and programs. Further, according to the CIA:

. . . a SALT II agreement along the lines currently being envisioned would not in itself significantly alter [the CIA] projection of Soviet defense spending. Such an agreement would probably reduce the rate of growth of total Soviet defense spending by only about 0.2 of a percentage point per year. The resulting savings would amount to less than 1.5 percent of total defense spending projected through the early 1980s in the absence of an agreement.